

Primary research tools

The primary research tools are surveys, interviews, and participant observation.

Surveys are a popular and familiar research method. A survey poses a series of questions about a topic of interest. It can be done in person, over the phone, or online. Surveys enable a researcher to get the same type of information from a large group or sample of people. For example, a researcher interested in identifying important civic issues in your community could create a survey that asks participants to rank the issues on a list from least to most important.

Interviews may be conducted in person, over the phone, or online. Like a survey, an interview consists of a series of questions about a common topic. Unlike a survey, an interview is usually conducted with one person or a small group of people and the questions asked are more open-ended. For example, using the example of important civic issues in your community, a one-on-one or small group interview could be used to explore more open-ended questions in greater depth.

Participant observation is an interactive research method that allows a researcher to watch participants as they go about their lives. Participants may or may not know that they are being observed (provided this research does not harm them or compromise their privacy). For example, in the case of civic issues, the researcher could sit in a local community meeting to observe and record the issues that participants discuss and are most interested in.